

THE COLLAPSE OF
CIVILIZATION

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What midsummer madness!
What a wretched Sabbath!
=Church peace union, New York
The Collapse of Civilization

Has civilization collapsed in Europe? Has Christianity been thrown to the dogs, and have the nations gone mad? In a moment, almost without premonition, millions of men on the Continent have become frenzied, and with wild eyes, with bestial thirst for blood, and with savage yells are rushing to rip their brothers' bowels out. Women are rushing from besieged and burning cities with tiny babies in their arms, and little, cold, hungry, tired boys and girls, hardly old enough to walk, trying to keep up. Poverty stares millions in the face—poverty not only during this war, but during long years to come. Thousands of women are to be widowed, millions of little children are to be left fatherless. Natural affections are even now blotted out and their places being taken by strange, cruel lusts and passions. The virtue of women will be a free commodity for all soldiers. Drunkenness has already spread throughout these lands in a mad orgy. All industry will be ruined. Thousands of farms and villages will be laid waste. Thousands of schools and churches will be blown up. Hatreds will be engendered which will keep Europe irritated fifty years after the peace of exhaustion shall have come. The commerce of the world will be upset. The general morality of Europe will be lowered to a point where the churches will have to begin all over again and work a hundred years to restore it. Already thousands of atheists have been made. Almost every other man we have met in Europe this last week

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has shook his head with sadness and said: "What's the good of Christianity if it cannot stop this sort of thing." It is as if the Devil and all his angels had taken complete possession of Europe.

And what is it all about? Nobody knows. The German people do not know why they are fighting the French and English and Russians. The French people do not know why, suddenly, without a week's warning, they were fighting the Germans. The English people had no more desire to go to war with Germans than have we in America, and yet with hardly a week's notice they are crossing the Channel to shoot their brothers, with whom, only five days before, they had been assembled in a medical conference and a peace conference, brothers knowing no nationality, only kindly comradeship, common goodwill toward all men. Who started it? No one knows who originally started it, for no one knows what despicable intrigues have been going on in one of two governments for years. All one knows is that Austria, most cowardly and reckless of nations, knowing she would plunge all Europe into arms, to get revenge for a crime committed by an individual, who should have been punished as an individual, attacks a weak, impoverished nation, and Germany, instead of rebuking her, evidently stands behind; while, of course, Russia, friend of Servia, begins to mobilize her troops to befriend Servia. Then Germany has to mobilize. Then, of course, France gets frightened and mobilizes her army. England tries to bring the nations together for friendly conference, but Austria will not listen. England remains neutral to the last. Then Germany goes crazy and begins recklessly to violate all treaties of neutrality, and seemingly is anxious to drag

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England into the war against her. And here we have the sight in the twentieth century of Christ's Churches of eight nations doing their best to annihilate one another, while at the same time the good people in every one of these nations, previous to the sudden spread of the war fever, bore no illwill to the good people of the other nations—indeed, had much goodwill.

We have just come through it all and know whereof we speak. Right on the eve of conflict, while all Europe was mobilizing its troops, with the sound of German soldiers marching off to war, eighty men, including Germans, English, French, Swiss, Scandinavians, Bulgarians and Americans, sat together in the parlors of the Insel Hotel at Constance, Germany, praying, while the other citizens of these countries were preparing to fight. There was no reason in the world why all the rest of the Germans, French and English should not have been praying instead of fighting, except that they who began the fighting were not Christians, while those who were at Constance were. No power in heaven or earth could have involved the French and German delegates at Constance in a war. They had passed beyond the war stage into the kingdom of God. The sessions of this Peace Conference of the Churches went right on while the war clouds gathered, the war only giving intensity to their purpose to work harder to persuade the nations of their folly. (And there was considerable feeling that it would be easy to do this after this awful cataclysm was over.) German, French and English delegates all pledged lasting friendship to one another, and declared that when this nightmare of the nations should pass they would come together in the same old bonds. Perhaps the only

solution of this awful curse of nations is the increase of these men of goodwill to be the majority in each nation and to have the power of government in their hands.

These Christians, these men of goodwill, these men who put Christ and brotherly love above revenge and chauvinistic nationalism, found they must leave Constance early in the morning of the day when they had hoped to continue their conference. It was the last day on which the German government could guarantee the safe passage of the English and American delegates across Germany. With not one dissenting vote the Conference voted *not to dissolve, not to stop crying goodwill amidst the clamor for revenge, not to cease saying Christ must ultimately prevail although all Europe seemed deserting Him*. It was resolved that the congress continue its sessions in London two days after. The Germans and French could not go, having been forbidden to leave their countries by this time. But the Scandinavians and others went along with the English and American delegates.

This trip across Germany on the *eve of war* was so remarkable and so full of indication of what real war would soon be that I may be pardoned if I refer to it here, although I have described our experiences at length in previous chapters. We were under the special protection of the Kaiser and had two special cars put at our disposal. After a long journey lasting all day and all night we were dropped at the Dutch border (Goch) on the way to Flushing. But what a day! How it wrung one's heart! How it made our American delegates sick of the very thought of war forever! We saw all the young men and boys being driven like sheep into pens to be sent

off to kill men they did not know and with whom they had no quarrel. We saw mothers and wives weeping at the departure of the men, and little children crying, although they knew nothing of what it was all about. We saw men go crazy at this parting and have to be put in cords and held. We saw great crowds drunk with brandy, and howling "To Hell with Germany" or "To Hell with France." We saw French soldiers try to pull a German out of a train window, while he clung to his two little babies that he was trying to get into Switzerland, We saw Germans yank a Russian and his wife out of a train, and so frighten the wife that her little baby could not nurse for two days. We saw swarms of Germans trying to get out of France with their poor wives and babies, with no one to help and with French soldiers jeering at them and threatening them. Some of our party saw the Germans stand four Servians up against a wall and shoot them right down because they refused to assume German arms. We saw industry stopped, and carts full of mere boys packed into freight cars with horses, and bundled off to the frontier. It was all prophetic of the awful suffering which was to come. But what we saw, in the complete degradation of all the finer human, Christian instincts on every hand, made our hearts bleed. It was impossible to believe. Even now that we are back in America, with the newsboys shouting every hour the news of many thousands slain, it is almost impossible to believe it is not all a dream.

What does it all mean? It means many things. First of all it means that there is something the matter with our Christianity, or else that we are not presenting it truly. For it seems to have no power whatever over men

or nations when any *real* provocative of men's passions comes. Most of these millions of men who are now drunk with lust of killing, and hoarsely shouting for their brothers' blood, have been calling themselves Christians and have been taught in Christian schools and churches. And in a day it is all forgotten, and if one who remembers dares suggest, as a few did suggest in the various parliaments and in the press, that we remember our religion, he is hooted down. Is it that the human heart is too desperately wicked for even Christianity to control it when the deepest passions of all, revenge and lust of blood, are aroused? Is it that it can find only a few in each community—which is all it has yet done—whom it can fully regenerate? Or is it that we have been concerned too much with dealing with those sins which are more easily uprooted and controlled, and have neglected to uproot those awful, fiendish, demoniacal passions that burst forth at such a time as this? Or have we in our endeavor to inculcate righteousness in our personal dealing with our brother of our own land neglected altogether to eradicate from men the **beast** which such a crisis as this reveals as only slumbering. For the thousands of men we saw howling in all the cities of Europe were not men any longer. They had become beasts. The beast could even be seen in their eyes. They howled for only three things: drink, women, and blood of their brothers. Perhaps there has got to be a wholly new presentation of Christianity before these things can be stopped. 'Perhaps we have got really to teach what Christ himself taught, namely, that love of all Christians for each other, all men of goodwill for one another, must transcend race, nationality and every other bond.

We have never dared preach this, although it was continually on Christ's lips. He even went further, and said it must transcend family ties. It would be as impossible for one Christian to kill another, did we really believe in Christ and accept His Gospel, as it would be for a man to kill his mother. Another thing which we think every American of the fifty who got this first sight of war has come to feel is that our religion has broken down in its psychology, that our Gospel has been addressed to a man who does not exist, that our sermons have been preached to an imaginary man. We have been preaching to men as highly respectable, on the whole good, some of them saintly, while as a matter of fact this has been only seeming. They have seemed this because great temptations have not roused them from their sleep. No one who came across Europe within the last month can ever hold this easy faith again. Men are beasts; cruel, lustful, revengeful, ravening, just as the Gospel represents them. There are exceptions, but in most of us the beast lies just below the surface, and nothing but a regeneration which shall sweep through men's souls as a wind from heaven can make them clean. There is no hope for Europe until it is seen that men's souls need a power to cleanse them from the dominion of the beast, far greater than either the church or ethical culture is at present providing.

In the second place it means the complete collapse of the present political order. Whatever may be the outcome of this terrible Armageddon, one thing is settled forever—that the present political and international order is utterly inadequate to either secure justice or preserve the peace. For years these nations have been piling up

vast armaments, Germany, Austria, France, England and Russia, "to preserve the peace." This is what they all have said—and, we have no doubt, said it sincerely. So each one has armed, each one in a mad rush to outdo the other. None have wanted war—but war was inevitable as an outcome. It will be always so. Many have foreseen it. Only a year ago two of the best known Englishmen, Canon Henson and Alfred Noyes, told Americans that if this arming went on the universal slaughter was sure to come. It has come. It is the only logical thing that could come. Nations that are bristling with arms are always going to fight. All Europe is learning this lesson to-day through an awful experience, but perhaps it is the only way men without insight could be taught. Never again can any man say "the way to get peace is to prepare for war." He can say "the way to protect yourself is to arm," perhaps, for it is impossible to see how any one nation in Europe can cease to arm so long as others do. Neither Germany nor Austria can any longer be trusted, both of them having broken the most sacred treaties without a qualm. But that the way to get justice or peace is to prepare for war has been dissipated forever. *Armaments mean war.* That is now settled forever, and is no longer worth debating. On the other hand, any disarmament must be simultaneous. We found many statesmen, with whom we talked in Europe, feeling that Europe will have her faith in arms, and iron, and powder as the basis of civilization, justice and peace, so rudely shattered, that they will be willing to come together and consider whether it is not time to go on to the new basis of law, justice, international co-operation and armaments reduced to a police basis. This is the

point every American should urge upon Europe in this hour when she will be impressionable to this gospel.

In the third place, the kind of *patriotism* the nations of Europe have been cherishing is discredited also, and proved a source of infinite misery even to the country toward which it is directed. This whole miserable business has arisen out of a perverted patriotism, a race consciousness raised to the power of madness. It was a Servian "patriot," a devotee of "Greater Servia," who threw the bomb that stirred Austria to revenge. All through Europe there is this patriotism which makes a god of one's country and declares there is no other god, which is forever imputing intrigues and schemes to other countries, which goes into fervors about one's own country that exasperates other countries, which would clamor for little rights for one's own country and bring on a war, regardless of the effect it would have upon six or eight innocent countries, which puts love of country above love of one's country being right, and which talks more about love of country than it does about love of God and all His children. This awful tragedy, beyond anything since Napoleon's day, is the result of this sort of patriotism. The time has come to lift this quality up into something high, noble and universal. We are glad the report of the Federal Council delegates at Constance to the churches of America emphasizes this need of Christianizing patriotism.

Finally, one thing even the blind can see lies at the root of all this calamity of the nations, and that is our neglect to preach the one truth on which any lasting order of justice or peace can be reared, namely, that *nations must be amenable to the same Christian ethics*

that govern the relationships of men. There can be no double standard of ethics in the kingdom of God. Right must be right and wrong be wrong throughout the whole universe of men. If it is wrong for men to steal, it is just as criminal for big nations to seize little ones. If it is wrong for men to murder, it is wrong for nations to kill and destroy weaker nations, or men in any nation. If it is unchristian for men to settle their disputes with their fists, it is wrong for nations to adjust their quarrels by iron fists on sea or land. If it is Christian for a man to negotiate on all questions with his brother in the sweet Christian spirit of forbearance, charity, even forgiveness, what else can be Christian for nations? We have not believed this, we have not preached it in our pulpits, nor taught it in our schools. We are going to learn it now in this year of agony. Every pulpit should reiterate it every week.

We heard many saying, "This is God's way of accomplishing some great thing." Let us be very careful how we say that. Man's wickedness is too apparent in it all. We are always too ready to impute our crimes and sins to God. It is much more likely that God is weeping in the heavens because we are killing the members of His family, His little babies, His sons and daughters—and *all over nothing*. That is the pity of it—*all over nothing*. No great principle at stake (except as England entered in to help the neutral nations), no holy cause to defend, no issue that can be of any value to the world, no gain that can come to any nation commensurate to the loss all will sustain. Conceived in intrigue and revenge, being waged in lust and furious hatreds—let us not impute any of it to the Father who loves all His children equally.

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they walk

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